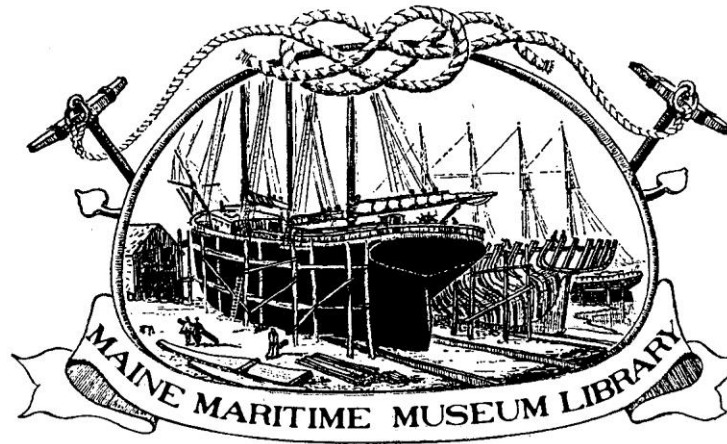


**Maine Maritime Museum Library**

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**Inventory for  
Manuscript Collection  
MS - 25**

**Rotch Family Business Papers**

**1803-1836  
Bulk: 1812-1821**

by  
Elisabeth Meier  
March 2018

1 box  
.4 linear feet  
*Accession no. 72.312.1-22*

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## Abstract

### **William Rotch Jr. & Sons (circa 1787-1849)**

### **William R. Rotch & Co. (circa 1813-1859)**

#### **Papers, 1803-1836**

Bulk dates: 1812-1821

1 box

Merchants, whaling ship owners, and manufacturers in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

This collection contains correspondence, lists of prices current, and some vessel papers from William Rotch Jr. & Sons and William R. Rotch & Company of New Bedford. The bulk of the collection consists of letters from merchants regarding the Rotches' transatlantic trade in whale oil, Baltic naval stores, and southern rice, cotton, and flour. There is only one document, a shipping agreement, directly related to whaling.

Gift of Howard P. Livesley.

MS-025. Accession #72.312.1-22.

Finding aid (folder level control) in repository.

#### **Added entries—persons:**

Cuffe, Paul (1759-1817)

Rotch, Thomas (1791-1840)

Rotch, Joseph (1790-1839)

Rotch, William, Jr. (1759-1850)

Rotch, William Rodman (1788-1860)

#### **Added entries—corporate bodies (including vessels):**

*Cambria* (ship)

*Francis*

*Minerva* (ship)

*William & Eliza*

William Rotch Jr. & Sons

William R. Rotch & Co.

*William Thatcher* (brig)

#### **Added entries—key terms:**

Baltic Sea – Commerce

Cotton trade

Crew lists

Merchant ships

Naval stores

New Bedford (MA)

Price indexes

United States – History – War of 1812

Whale-oil

## **Acquisition**

This collection was given to the museum by Howard P. Livesley of Fairhaven, Massachusetts. Livesley salvaged the papers from the former William Rotch counting house in New Bedford when the structure was demolished.

## **Restrictions**

There are no restrictions on this collection.

## **Physical Condition**

The documents are mostly in good condition. A few have stains and minor water damage in addition to usual wear.

## **Processing Notes**

This collection contains material from two separate but related companies, William Rotch Jr. & Sons and William R. Rotch & Co. There are remnants of an original filing system for the latter, in which incoming letters were grouped by the sender's location and year, held together by tight, labeled paper sleeves. The filing system used by William Rotch Jr. & Sons is unclear, but, given the spotty survival of material, letters were apparently also grouped by year. Within these broad organizational schemes, letters have been filed alphabetically by sender in lieu of an obvious original system.

William R. Rotch & Co. also grouped lists of prices current by year. These have been kept in order by date produced.

The original accession included three copies of the *Whalemen's Shipping List* and the *Merchants' Transcript* from 1874. These have been separated from the manuscript material.

## **Related Materials**

More material can be found at the New Bedford Whaling Museum in MSS 2 and MSS 130, both called the Rotch Family Papers.

## **Historical Note**

Members of the Rotch family were leading merchants, ship owners, and manufacturers in New Bedford from the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries. The businesses represented in this collection are just two of their many partnerships.

The family originated in Nantucket's Quaker community, where William Rotch Sr. (1734-1828) was a successful merchant and whale-ship owner. His son, William Rotch Jr. (1759-1850), also an active Quaker, moved to New Bedford in 1787 to enter the same business there. William Jr.'s own sons, William Rodman (1788-1860), Joseph (1790-1839), and Thomas (1791-1840), eventually joined their father as partners in William Rotch Jr. & Sons before starting off on their own. William R. Rotch & Co. was one of these third generation firms.

In New Bedford, the Rotch family is best known for its outsized role in the whaling industry. They owned and managed whaling ships, a wharf, warehouses, and a candle house to convert whale oil into lighting. As New Bedford's economy developed, the Rotches were also at

the forefront of expansion into banking, ropemaking, and textile mills. In addition, the Rotch family operated a substantial merchant fleet. In the early nineteenth century, they maintained a complex, three-way network between New Bedford, the Baltic, and the upper South in which they sold whale oil and spermaceti candles in exchange for Swedish iron, Russian naval stores, Georgia rice and cotton, and Chesapeake flour. The profits of these diverse ventures cemented the Rotch family's place at the pinnacle of New Bedford society.

### **Scope and Content Note**

This collection contains letters, lists of prices current, and scattered vessel papers from William Rotch Jr. & Sons and William R. Rotch and Company of New Bedford, Massachusetts. The vast majority of the collection is related to the Rotches' merchant fleet in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Only a few of the vessel papers directly represent the whaling business.

The bulk of the collection consists of incoming correspondence. A majority of this is from merchants in the Baltic and mid-Atlantic reporting on market conditions and the progress of Rotch vessels and cargoes under their care. Like the Rotches, many of these merchants were Quakers. Letters from the year 1812 discuss the intricacies of maritime trade at the outbreak of war. There are relatively few letters from captains, although these notably include a note from Paul Cuffe, an African-American shipmaster and businessman.

Other documents in the collection include lists of prices current for Bremen, Liverpool, Gothenburg, and other northern European ports for the year 1820. Vessel papers consist of shipping agreements, bills, insurance, and detailed contracts to build and repair vessels in New Bedford.

## Box and Folder List

Box	Folder	
1	1	Articles of agreement, <i>William Thatcher</i> (brig), c. 1825 Whaleman's shipping paper, <i>Cambria</i> (ship), 1836
	2	Bills, <i>William Thatcher</i> (brig), 1820
	3	Bill of lading, <i>Orchard</i> (sloop), 1803
	4	Insurance, <i>Status Ante Bellum</i> (schooner), 1816; <i>Elizabeth</i> (bark), 1829; <i>Crozimbo</i> (ship), 1836
	5	Construction agreement, John Hammond, Pardon Brightman, and Thurston Chapman, to repair the <i>Minerva</i> (ship), 1818 William P. Canedy, to build a new ship, 1818 Correspondence, 1812, William Rotch Jr. & Sons, incoming from:
	6	William Allen
	7	Abraham Barker
	8	Abraham Barker
	9	B-H: Jacob Barker, Captain Paul Cuffe, Samuel R. Fisher, Hathaway & Scull, Howland & Grinnell
	10	M-O: M. Mestayer, William Moore, Abraham Ogden
	11	Joseph Rotch, Francis Rotch Correspondence, 1816, William Rotch Jr. & Sons
	12	B-D: Belfour, Ellah & Rainals, Boer & Moens, Captain Eben Clark, Cleeman & Co., Brothers Cramer, James Day
	13	Cropper, Benson & Co.
	14	F & E Delius
	15	Thomas Dickason & Co.
	16	G-S: Good, Rainals & Co, J. G. Graepels & Son, John L. Harris, Harvey, Deave & Co, Captain George Hitch, Hutchinson, Travers & Co., Kantzow & Biel, Oetling & Vogler, Scherer & Finguerlin Correspondence, 1819-1823, William R. Rotch & Co.
	17	Philadelphia: Caleb Hathaway
	18	Philadelphia: William Baker, T & J Biddle, Fry & Malbone, Joseph Rotch, W.R. Rotch, Joseph S. Russell, Smith & Russell, Waln & Morris
	19	Baltimore: Ballard & Hall, Hall & Marean, W. P. P. Van Baggen
	20	Richmond: Davenport & Allen, Lewis Ludlow & Co. Alexandria: Lawrason & Fowle, William Fowle & Co.
	21	Norfolk: Captain John Akin, Francis Rotch New Bern: A. D. Stoddard Savannah: Isaac R. Gifford Correspondence, 1829, William R. Rotch & Co.
	22	Bremen: F & E Delius, H. H. Meier & Co.
	23	Prices Current, April – December 1819
	24	January – May 1820
	25	July 1820 – January 1821